



When a healthy pregnancy
turns deadly.
The story of April Valentine.

Featuring Stanis Askew, Doula

This time on Code WACK!

April Valentine knew that Black women were more likely to die from a pregnancy or child-related cause -- and tried to beat the odds with careful research, preparation and a supportive birthing team. **So why did the 31-year-old die at an L.A.- area hospital while in labor with her baby girl?**

To find out, we spoke to April's doula, **Stanis Askew**, who works with [Frontline Doulas](#), a perinatal health program that connects Black families with Black doulas. ***While the incident remains under investigation, here is April's tragic story told through the eyes of her doula.***

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What was it like to work with April?

"We just naturally clicked...She was a true light and a joy to be around, and an advocate for herself and for others. So she had done her research and knew how important it was and that's part of why she wanted the program to have a doula. She knew the statistics."

She said, *"I think I at least need a weekly call. Like I want to be able to check in weekly."*

[I said] *"You know what, we can do that. And if there's some time that I can come in person and meet with you, in addition to, I'm okay with doing that too, because it's not about the money for me. It's truly about you having a great birthing experience"....* She herself was already an advocate for herself." – **Stanis Askew**

Given that April chose walking as her mode of exercise during her pregnancy, and walked 6 miles with her sister and 4 miles with her doula just days before she died, did she seem to be in good condition as she started her contractions?

"Everything was good. She's definitely what I would call in your early stages. Feeling the contractions, tightening of the belly. Things are moving." – **Stanis Askew**

How did April take the news that you weren't going to be allowed to be with her, even after being assured multiple times that you would be?

"[She said] 'they're saying they're not going to allow you in...' She gets panicky. 'They said they're not going to let you in.' I'm like 'okay, calm down, it's gonna be alright.' 'I'm not leaving you' were my exact words, 'you are not doing this alone. I'm not leaving you. We will text. We will video call. We will do whatever it is. It's just a curveball...'

*"She was like, 'Why? Why would they do that?' You know, so I'm just trying to help her remain calm at this point. I'm trying to keep myself calm as well. It was up until this point, every week she's been asking and confirming with the doctor, I had sent credentials in to confirm that I have the credentials to be in the hospital. ... and you get told, 'No, now your doula's not allowed to be in.' - **Stanis Askew***

Helpful Links

[Why do so many Black women die in pregnancy? One reason: Doctors don't take them seriously, AP News](#)

[Prime Healthcare hospital under investigation after death of new mother, Becker's Hospital Review](#)

[A Los Angeles Family Seeks Answers — And Accountability — After Black Mom Dies In Childbirth - LAist](#)

[She planned to have a smooth delivery. Now the hospital is under investigation for her death, The Guardian](#)

[Challenges Reported by California Doula Pilot Programs, National Health Law Program](#)

[How to navigate 'medical gaslighting' when doctors dismiss your symptoms, Today.com](#)

[Agent: Tori Bowie, who died in childbirth, was not actively performing home birth when baby started to arrive, CBS News](#)

[Tori Bowie's death highlights the fact that Black maternal mortality rates are high — and rising, Yahoo Life](#)

Episode Transcript

Read the full [episode transcript](#).

Biography: Stanis Askew, Doula

Stanis Askew, who works with [Frontline Doulas](#), is a Southern California-based full-spectrum doula who is passionate about helping people and supporting Black births. She says she first became a doula at the age of seven when her older sister – then a teenager - revealed to her that she was pregnant. Askew applies her 18-plus years of experience in human resources to her birthwork. She has developed and implemented techniques that allow her to collaborate with medical professionals in a unique way.

Askew helps birthing families from conception to 40 days after birth. She encourages a healthy and active pregnancy and is a certified yoga instructor, lactation educator and parent coach.

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